



DNR NEWS – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DNR deems PolyMet mine environmental impact statement adequate

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has determined that the environmental impact statement (EIS) for PolyMet Mining, Inc.'s proposed NorthMet project meets the state's standards for adequacy.

DNR Commissioner Tom Landwehr said the process leading to the completion of the state's EIS has been deliberative and thorough.

"The environmental review process is about describing the potential environmental effects of the proposed NorthMet project," Landwehr said. "We are confident this document has thoroughly examined the important environmental topics and has addressed them."

The 3,500-page EIS has been DNR's largest environmental review by several measures. The project has involved more than 90,000 hours of state staff time, the cost of which was reimbursed by PolyMet Mining. The Supplemental Draft EIS received the most comments ever – 58,000 – and about 4,000 people attended three public meetings in 2014.

"The public input process has been extraordinary and I want to thank everyone who provided comments," Landwehr said. "The input has helped us produce a better document."

The adequacy determination marks the end of the state Environmental Impact Statement process under the Minnesota Environmental Policy Act, but it does not mean the NorthMet project has been approved or may proceed to construction. Additional environmental analysis and evaluation will occur upon receipt of permit applications.

The project would need to receive more than 20 types of local, state and federal approvals and permits.

In addition, both the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers must still complete their records of decision. The Forest Service is expected to issue its final decision on the land exchange in late spring. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' process will take longer.

Determining the document was adequate

In determining the EIS is adequate, the DNR followed state law and based its decision on these three criteria:

- Does the EIS analyze the topics identified in scoping?
- Does the EIS respond to comments received on the draft?

- Did the DNR follow the process established in state statute and rule for preparing an environmental impact statement?

Prior to making its adequacy determination, the DNR systematically reviewed all of the approximately 30,000 comments the agency received on the Final EIS and considered them in relation to the three criteria.

The agency also has produced a record of decision that articulates the basis for its adequacy determination and documents its consideration of the comments it received on the Final EIS.

Permitting process

The proposed NorthMet project now moves forward to the permitting process. PolyMet Mining has been working over the last several months to develop its permit applications, making use of the analysis in the EIS.

At this point, the DNR has not received permit applications from the company and thus the agency is unable to estimate timelines for permit decisions.

Each of the required permits would authorize specific activities related to the project and each has its own applicable rules and processes. All of the permits are necessary, but none is sufficient by itself.

"I can say that several of these permit applications will be quite complex and will require extensive work by the DNR and other state agencies," Landwehr said.

The permitting process evaluates the details of a project to determine whether it can comply with all applicable environmental regulations. Permits would establish the required measures needed to avoid, minimize or mitigate environmental impacts.

Key permits include the permit to mine and dam safety permit from DNR and the water quality and air quality permits from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

The permit to mine process evaluates many details of the proposed mine plan, including financial assurance. Financial assurance is the money a company must set aside to ensure essential environmental protections are funded in the event the company is unable or unwilling to implement those measures.

About the NorthMet mine proposal

The proposed NorthMet mine project would be located in the St. Louis River watershed on the eastern edge of the Mesabi Iron Range, about 6 miles south of Babbitt and about 1 mile south of the existing iron-ore Northshore Mine. The ore would be processed at a former industrial site, the LTV plant in Hoyt Lakes.

The total project area would include the open pit mine, a processing plant, tailings basin and an existing 7-mile-long railroad corridor for ore transport between the mine and the processing plant. The proposed land exchange involves 6,650 acres of federal land at the proposed mine site and 6,722 acres of non-federal land located in Lake and St. Louis counties.

NOTE TO MEDIA:

Media resources: A packet with a news release, the EIS record of decision and fact sheets will be available to reporters at the 2:00 p.m. news conference at the DNR Central Office in St. Paul.

Web resources: The EIS record of decision and other materials that help explain the agency's decision are posted on the agency's website at [[HYPERLINK "http://www.mndnr.gov/polymet"](http://www.mndnr.gov/polymet)].

Broadcast resources: TV sound bites from the news conference will be available after 4 p.m. at [[HYPERLINK "ftp://mediaroom.dnr.state.mn.us"](ftp://mediaroom.dnr.state.mn.us)] in folder named "news release resources," then in folder named "03-03-15 PolyMet."